

Haitian Creole

Haitian Creole (/ˈheɪˌfən ˈkriːoʊl/) is a French-based creole language spoken by 10–12 million people worldwide, and the only language of most Haitians.^{[4][5]} It is called *kreyòl ayisyen* or just *kreyòl* ([kʁɛjɔ̃]) by its speakers,^{[6][7]} and *créole haïtien* in Standard French.

The language emerged from contact between French settlers and enslaved Africans during the Atlantic slave trade in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti). Although its vocabulary is mostly taken from 18th-century French, it also has influences from Spanish, Portuguese, Taino, English and West African languages.^[8] It is not mutually intelligible with standard French, and has its own distinctive grammar. Haitians are the largest community in the world speaking a modern creole language.^[9]

Usage of, and education in, Haitian Creole has been contentious since at least the 19th century; some Haitians view French as a legacy of colonialism, while Creole was maligned by francophones as a miseducated person's French.^{[10][11]} Until the late 20th century, Haitian presidents spoke only standard French to their fellow citizens, and until the 2000s, all instruction at Haitian elementary schools was in modern standard French, a second language to most of the students.^[4]

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Origins

Haitian Creole contains elements from both the Romance group of Indo-European languages through its superstratum, French, as well as African languages.^{[12][13][14]} There are many theories on the formation of the Haitian Creole language.

One theory estimates that Haitian Creole developed between 1680 and 1740.^{[15][16]} During the 16th and 17th centuries, French and Spanish colonizers produced tobacco, cotton, and sugar cane on the island.^[16] Throughout this period, the population was made of roughly equal numbers of *engagés* (employed whites), *gens de couleur* and slaves.^[17] Singler estimates the economy shifted into sugar production in 1690, just before the French colony of *Saint-Domingue* was officially formed in 1697.^[15] The sugar crops needed a much larger labor force, which led to an increase in slave importation. In the 18th century an estimated 800,000 West-African individuals were enslaved and brought to Saint-Domingue.^[16] As the slave population increased, interactions between French-speaking colonists and slaves decreased.

Many African slaves in French ownership were from Niger-Congo-speaking territory, and particularly from Kwa languages such as Gbe and the Central Tano languages and Bantu languages.^[15] Singler suggests that the number of Bantu speakers decreased while the number of Kwa speakers increased, with Gbe being the most dominant group. The first fifty years of Saint-Domingue's sugar boom coincided with emergent Gbe predominance in the French Caribbean. In the interval during which Singler hypothesizes the language evolved, the Gbe population was around 50% of the imported slave population.^[15]

Haitian Creole	
<i>kreyòl ayisyen</i>	
Pronunciation	[kʁɛjɔ̃ ajisjɛ̃]
Native to	Haiti
Ethnicity	Afro-Haitians
<div>Native speakers</div>	9.6 million (2007) ^[1]
<div>Language family</div>	<div>French Creole <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circum-Caribbean French<ul style="list-style-type: none">Haitian Creole</div>
<div>Writing system</div>	Latin (Haitian Creole alphabet)
Official status	
<div>Official language in</div>	Haiti
Regulated by	Akademi Kreyòl Ayisyen (Haitian Creole Academy) ^[2]
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ht (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ht)
ISO 639-2	hat (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=181)
ISO 639-3	hat
Glottolog	hait1244 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/hait1244) Haitian ^[3]
Linguasphere	51-AAC-cb
IETF	ht
 <div>Location of Haiti</div>	

In contrast to the African languages, a type of classical French (*français classique*) and langues d'oïl (Norman, Poitevin and Saintongeais dialects, Gallo and Picard) were spoken during the 17th and 18th centuries in Saint-Domingue, as well as in New France and French West Africa.^{[7][18]} Slaves who seldom could communicate with fellow slaves would try to learn French. With the constant importation of slaves, the language gradually became formalized and became a distinct tongue to French. The language was also picked up by the whites and became used by all those born in what is now Haiti.^[7]

Difference between Haitian Creole and French

Haitian Creole and French have similar pronunciations and share many lexical items. In fact, over 90% of the Haitian Creole vocabulary is of French origin.^[19] However, many cognate terms actually have different meanings. For example, as Valdman mentions in *Haitian Creole: Structure, Variation, Status, Origin*, the word for "frequent" in French is *fréquent*; however, its cognate in Haitian Creole *frekan* means 'insolent, rude, and impertinent' and usually refers to people.^[20] In addition, the grammars of Haitian Creole and French are very different. For example, in Haitian Creole, verbs are not conjugated as they are in French.^[7]

Both Haitian Creole and French have also experienced semantic change; words that had a single meaning in the 17th century have changed or have been replaced in both languages.^[7] For example, "*Ki jan ou rele?*" ("What is your name?") corresponds to the French *Comment vous appelez-vous ?* Although the average French speaker would not understand this phrase, every word in it is in fact of French origin: *qui* "who"; *genre* "manner"; *vous* "you", and *héler* "to call", but the verb *héler* has been replaced by *appeler* in modern French and reduced to a meaning of "to flag down".^[7]

Lefebvre proposed the theory of relexification, arguing that the process of relexification (the replacement of the phonological representation of a substratum lexical item with the phonological representation of a superstratum lexical item, so that the Haitian creole lexical item looks like French, but works like the substratum language(s)) was central in the development of Haitian Creole.^[21]

The Fon language, a modern Gbe language native to Benin, Nigeria and Togo in West Africa, is often used to compare grammatical structure between Haitian Creole and to relexify it with vocabulary from French.^[22]

French	Fon	Haitian Creole	English
<i>la maison</i> ^[23]	<i>afe a</i>	<i>kay la</i>	the house

History

Early development

Haitian Creole developed in the 17th and 18th centuries on the western third of Hispaniola in a setting that mixed native speakers of various Niger–Congo languages with French colonizers.^[24] In the early 1940s under President Élie Lescot, attempts were made to standardize the language. American linguistic expert Frank Laubach and Irish Methodist missionary H. Ormonde McConnell developed a standardized Haitian Creole orthography. Although some regarded the orthography highly, it was generally not well received.^[25] Its orthography was standardized in 1979. That same year Haitian Creole was elevated in status by the Act of 18 September 1979.^[26] The *Institut Pédagogique National* established an official orthography for Creole, and slight modifications were made over the next two decades. For example, the hyphen (-) is no longer used, nor is the apostrophe.^{[27]:131[10]:185–192} The only accent mark retained is the grave accent in ⟨è⟩ and ⟨ò⟩.^{[10]:433}

Becoming an official language

The Constitution of 1987 upgraded Haitian Creole to a national language alongside French.^[28] It classified French as the *langue d'instruction* or "language of instruction", and Creole was classified as an *outil d'enseignement* or a "tool of education". The Constitution of 1987 names both Haitian Creole and French as the official languages, but recognizes Haitian Creole as the only language that all Haitians hold in common.^{[29]:263[30]}

Literature development

Even without government recognition, by the end of the 1800s, there were already literary texts written in Haitian Creole such as Oswald Durand's *Choucounne* and Georges Sylvain's *Cric? Crac!*. Félix Morisseau-Leroy was another influential author of Haitian Creole work. Since the 1980s, many educators, writers, and activists have written literature in Haitian Creole. In 2001, *Open Gate: An Anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry* was published. It was the first time a collection of Haitian Creole poetry was published in both Haitian Creole and English.^[31] On 28 October 2004, the Haitian daily *Le Matin* first published an entire edition in Haitian Creole in observance of the country's newly instated "Creole Day".^{[32]:556}

List of Haitian Creole-language writers

- Louis-Philippe Dalembert
- Frankétienne
- Ady Jean-Gardy

- [Josaphat-Robert Large](#)
- [Félix Morisseau-Leroy](#)
- [Elsie Suréna](#)
- [Lyonel Trouillot](#)

Sociolinguistics

Role in society

Although both modern standard French and Haitian Creole are official languages in Haiti, standard French is often considered the high language and Haitian Creole as the low language in the diglossic relationship of these two languages in society.^[20] That is to say, for the minority of Haitian population that is bilingual, the use of these two languages largely depends on the social context: standard French is used more in public, especially in formal situations, whereas Haitian Creole is used more on a daily basis and is often heard in ordinary conversation.^[33]

There is a large population in Haiti that speaks only Haitian Creole, whether under formal or informal conditions:

French plays no role in the very formal situation of a Haitian peasant (more than 80% of the population make a living from agriculture) presiding at a family gathering after the death of a member, or at the worship of the family lwa or voodoo spirits, or contacting a Catholic priest for a church baptism, marriage, or solemn mass, or consulting a physician, nurse, or dentist, or going to a civil officer to declare a death or birth.

— Yves Dejean^{[34]:192}

Use in educational system

In most schools, French is still the preferred language for teaching. Generally speaking, Haitian Creole is more used in public schools,^[35] as that is where most children of ordinary families who speak Haitian Creole attend school.

Historically, the education system has been French-dominant. Except the children of elites, many had to drop out of school because learning French was very challenging to them and they had a hard time to follow up. The Bernard Reform of 1978 tried to introduce Haitian Creole as the teaching language in the first four years of primary school; however, the reform overall was not very successful.^[36] As a result, the use of Haitian Creole has grown but in a very limited way. After the earthquake in 2010, basic education became free and more accessible to the monolingual masses. The government is still trying to expand the use of Haitian Creole and improve the school system.^{[37][38]}

Orthography

Haitian Creole has a phonemic orthography with highly regular spelling, except for proper nouns and foreign words. According to the official standardized orthography, Haitian Creole is composed of the following 32 symbols: ⟨a⟩, ⟨an⟩, ⟨b⟩, ⟨ch⟩, ⟨d⟩, ⟨e⟩, ⟨è⟩, ⟨en⟩, ⟨f⟩, ⟨g⟩, ⟨h⟩, ⟨i⟩, ⟨j⟩, ⟨k⟩, ⟨l⟩, ⟨m⟩, ⟨n⟩, ⟨ng⟩, ⟨o⟩, ⟨ò⟩, ⟨on⟩, ⟨ou⟩, ⟨oun⟩, ⟨p⟩, ⟨r⟩, ⟨s⟩, ⟨t⟩, ⟨ui⟩, ⟨v⟩, ⟨w⟩, ⟨y⟩, and ⟨z⟩.^{[6]:100} The letters ⟨c⟩ and ⟨u⟩ are always associated with another letter (in the multigraphs ⟨ch⟩, ⟨ou⟩, ⟨oun⟩, and ⟨ui⟩). The Haitian Creole alphabet has no ⟨q⟩ or ⟨x⟩; when ⟨x⟩ is used in loanwords and proper nouns, it represents the sounds /ks/, /kz/, or /gz/.^{[10]:433}

Consonants			
Haitian orthography	IPA	Examples	English approximation
b	<u>b</u>	bagay	bow
ch	<u>ʃ</u>	cho	shoe
d	<u>d</u>	dous	do
f	<u>f</u>	fig	festival
g	<u>ɡ</u>	gòch	gain
h	<u>h</u>	hèn	hotel
j	<u>ʒ</u>	jedi	measure
k	<u>k</u>	kle	sky
l	<u>l</u>	liv	clean
m	<u>m</u>	machin	mother
n	<u>n</u>	nòt	note
ng	<u>ŋ</u>	bilding	feeling

Vowels			
Haitian orthography	IPA	Examples	English approximation
a	<u>a</u>	abako	bra
(or à before an n)		pàn	
e	<u>e</u>	ale	hey
è	<u>ɛ</u>	fèt	festival
i	<u>i</u>	lide	machine
o	<u>o</u>	zwazo	roughly like law (British English)
ò	<u>ɔ</u>	deyò	sort
ou	<u>u</u>	nou	you
Nasal vowels			
an (when not followed by a	<u>ɑ̃</u>	anpil	No English equivalent;

p	<u>p</u>	pase	spy
r	<u>ɾ</u>	rezon	between go and loch
s	<u>s</u>	sis	six
t	<u>t</u>	tout	to
v	<u>v</u>	vyann	vent
z	<u>z</u>	zero	zero
Non-native consonants			
dj	<u>dʒ</u>	djaz	jazz
Semivowels			
w	<u>w</u>	wi	we
y	<u>j</u>	pye	yes
Semivowel followed by vowel (digraph)			
ui	<u>ɥi</u>	uit	roughly like sweet

vowel)			nasalized [a]
en (when not followed by a vowel)	<u>m̃</u>	mwen	No English equivalent; nasalized [ɛ]
on (when not followed by a vowel)	<u>õ</u>	tonton	No English equivalent; nasalized [o]

- There are no silent letters in the Haitian Creole orthography.
- All sounds are always spelled the same, except when a vowel carries a grave accent (`) before ⟨ n ⟩, which makes it an oral vowel instead of a nasal vowel:
 - ⟨ en ⟩ for /ɛ̃/ and ⟨ èn ⟩ for /ɛn/;
 - ⟨ on ⟩ for /ɔ̃/ and ⟨ òn ⟩ for /ɔn/; and
 - ⟨ an ⟩ for /ã/ and ⟨ àn ⟩ for /an/.
- When immediately followed by a vowel in a word, the digraphs denoting the nasal vowels (⟨ an ⟩, ⟨ en ⟩, ⟨ on ⟩, and sometimes ⟨ ou ⟩) are pronounced as an oral vowel followed by /n/.
- There is some ambiguity in the pronunciation of the high vowels of the letters ⟨ i ⟩ and ⟨ ou ⟩ when followed in spelling by ⟨ n ⟩.^[39] Common words such as *moun* ("person") and *machin* ("car") end with consonantal /n/, while very few words, mostly adopted from African languages, contain nasalized high vowels, as in *houngan* ("vodou priest").

Haitian orthography debate

The first technical orthography for Haitian Creole was developed in 1940 by H. Ormonde McConnell. It was later revised with the help of Frank Laubach, resulting in the creation of what is known as the McConnell–Laubach orthography.^{[10]:434}

The McConnell–Laubach orthography received substantial criticism from members of the Haitian elite. Haitian scholar Charles Pressoir critiqued the McConnell–Laubach orthography for its lack of codified front rounded vowels, which are typically used only by francophone elites.^{[10]:436} Another criticism was of the broad use of the letters ⟨ k ⟩, ⟨ w ⟩, and ⟨ y ⟩, which Pressoir argued looked "too American".^{[10]:431–432} This criticism of the "American look" of the orthography was shared by many educated Haitians, who also criticized its association with Protestantism.^{[10]:432} The last of Pressoir's criticisms was that "the use of the circumflex to mark nasalized vowels" treated nasal sounds differently from the way they are represented in French, which he feared would inhibit the learning of French.^{[10]:431}

The creation of the orthography was essentially an articulation of the language ideologies of those involved and brought out political and social tensions between competing groups. A large portion of this tension lay in the ideology held by many that the French language is superior, which led to resentment of the language by some Haitians and an admiration for it from others.^{[10]:435} This orthographical controversy boiled down to an attempt to unify a conception of Haitian national identity. Where ⟨ k ⟩ and ⟨ w ⟩ seemed too Anglo-Saxon and American imperialistic, ⟨ c ⟩ and ⟨ ou ⟩ were symbolic of French colonialism.^{[40]:191}

French-based orthography

When Haiti was still a colony of France, edicts by the French government were often written in a French-lexicon creole and read aloud to the slave population.^[41] The first written text of Haitian Creole was composed in the French-lexicon in a poem called *Lisette quitté la plaine* in 1757 by Duvivier de la Mahautière, a White Creole planter.^{[41][42]}

Before Haitian Creole orthography was standardized in the late 20th century, spelling varied, but was based on subjecting spoken Haitian Creole to written French, a language whose spelling has not matched its pronunciation since at least the 16th century. Unlike the phonetic orthography, French orthography of Haitian Creole is not standardized and varies according to the writer; some use exact French spelling, others adjust the spelling of certain words to represent pronunciation of the cognate in Haitian Creole, removing the silent letters. For example:

Li ale travay nan maten (lit. "He goes to work in the morning") could be transcribed as:

- *Li ale travay nan maten*,

- *Lui aller travail nans matin*, or
- *Li aller travail nans matin*.

Grammar

Haitian Creole grammar is highly analytical: for example, verbs are not inflected for tense or person, and there is no grammatical gender, which means that adjectives and articles are not inflected according to the noun. The primary word order is subject–verb–object as it is in French and English.

Many grammatical features, particularly the pluralization of nouns and indication of possession, are indicated by appending certain markers, like *yo*, to the main word. There has been a debate going on for some years as to whether these markers are affixes or clitics, and if punctuation such as the hyphen should be used to connect them to the word.^{[10]:185–192}

Although the language's vocabulary has many words related to their French-language cognates, its sentence structure is like that of the West African Fon language.^[22]

Haitian Creole	Fon	French	English
<i>bekan</i> bike <i>mwen</i> my	<i>keke</i> bike <i>che</i> my	<i>ma</i> my <i>bécane</i> bike	my bike
<i>bekan</i> bike <i>mwen</i> my <i>yo</i> <i>Pl</i>	<i>keke</i> bike <i>che</i> my <i>le</i> <i>Pl</i>	<i>mes</i> my <i>bécanes</i> bikes	my bikes

Pronouns

There are six pronouns: first, second, and third person, each in both singular, and plural; all are of French etymological origin.^[43] There is no difference between direct and indirect objects.

Haitian Creole		Fon ^{[15]:142}	French	English
Long form	Short form ^{[27]:131[44]}			
<i>mwen</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>nyè</i>	<i>je</i>	I
			<i>j'</i>	
			<i>me</i>	me
			<i>m'</i>	
			<i>moi</i>	
<i>ou^{[a][b]}</i>	<i>w</i>	<i>hwè</i>	<i>tu</i>	you (singular), thou (archaic)
			<i>te</i>	
			<i>t'</i>	
			<i>toi</i>	
<i>li^[c]</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>é, éyè</i>	<i>il</i>	<i>he</i>
			<i>elle</i>	she, her
			<i>le</i>	him, it
			<i>la</i>	her, it
			<i>l'</i>	him, her, it
			<i>lui</i>	him, her, it
<i>nou</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>mí</i>	<i>nous</i>	we, us
			<i>vous^{[47]:94}</i>	you (plural) ^[d]
<i>yo^[e]</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>yé</i>	<i>ils</i>	they
			<i>elles</i>	
			<i>les</i>	them
			<i>leur</i>	
			<i>eux</i>	

- sometimes the French pronoun *on* ("one", "[generic] you", "[singular] they") is translated to Haitian Creole as *ou^[45]* and other times it is translated as *yo^[46]*
- sometimes *ou* is written as *w* and in the **sample phrases below**, *w* indicates *ou*.
- in the northern part of Haiti, *li* is often shortened to *i* as in Guadeloupe, Martinique and the other Lesser Antilles.
- in southern Haiti, the second person plural is *zòt*
- sometimes the French pronoun *on* ("one", "[generic] you", "[singular] they") is translated to Haitian Creole as *yo^[46]* and other times it is translated as *ou^[45]*

Possessive pronouns

Singular

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>pa mwen an</i>	<i>le mien</i>	mine (masculine)
	<i>la mienne</i>	mine (feminine)
<i>pa ou a</i>	<i>le tien</i>	yours (masculine)
	<i>la tienne</i>	yours (feminine)
<i>pa li a</i>	<i>le sien</i>	his/hers/its (masculine)
	<i>la sienne</i>	his/hers/its (feminine)
<i>pa nou an</i>	<i>le/la nôtre</i>	ours
	<i>le/la vôtre</i>	yours ("of you-PLURAL")
<i>pa yo a</i>	<i>le/la leur</i>	theirs

Plural

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>pa mwen yo</i>	<i>les miens</i>	mine
	<i>les miennes</i>	
<i>pa ou yo</i>	<i>les tiens</i>	yours
	<i>les tiennes</i>	
<i>pa li yo</i>	<i>les siens</i>	his/hers/its
	<i>les siennes</i>	
<i>pa nou yo</i>	<i>les nôtres</i>	ours
	<i>les vôtres</i>	yours ("of you-PLURAL")
<i>pa yo</i>	<i>les leurs</i>	theirs

Plural of nouns

Definite nouns are made plural when followed by the word *yo*; indefinite plural nouns are unmarked.

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>liv yo</i>	<i>les livres</i>	the books
<i>machin yo</i>	<i>les autos</i>	the cars
<i>fi yo met wòb</i>	<i>les filles mettent des robes</i>	the girl <u>s</u> put on dress <u>es</u>

Possession

Possession is indicated by placing the possessor or possessive pronoun after the item possessed. In the Capois dialect of northern Haiti, *a* or *an* is placed before the possessive pronoun. Note, however, that this is not considered the standard Kreyòl most often heard in the media or used in writing.^[48]

Possession does not indicate definiteness ("my friend" as opposed to "a friend of mine"), and possessive constructions are often followed by a definite article.

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>lajan li</i>	<i>son argent</i>	his money
		her money
<i>fanmi mwen</i>	<i>ma famille</i>	my family
<i>fanmi m</i>		
<i>fanmi an m</i> (Capois dialect)		
<i>kay yo</i>	<i>leur maison</i>	their house
	<i>leurs maisons</i>	their houses
<i>papa ou</i>	<i>ton père</i>	your father
<i>papa w</i>		
<i>chat Pyè a</i>	<i>le chat de Pierre</i>	Pierre's cat
<i>chèz Marie a</i>	<i>la chaise de Marie</i>	Marie's chair
<i>zanmi papa Jean</i>	<i>l'ami du père de Jean</i>	Jean's father's friend
<i>papa vwazen zanmi nou</i>	<i>le père du voisin de notre ami</i>	our friend's neighbor's father

Indefinite article

The language has two indefinite articles, *on* and *yon* (pronounced /õ/ and /jõ/) which correspond to French *un* and *une*. *Yon* is derived from the French *il y a un* ("there is a"). Both are used only with singular nouns, and are placed before the noun:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>on kouto</i>	<i>un couteau</i>	a knife
<i>yon kouto</i>		
<i>on kravat</i>	<i>une cravate</i>	a necktie
<i>yon kravat</i>		

Definite article

In Haitian Creole, the definite article has five forms,^{[49]:28} and it is placed **after** the noun it modifies. The final syllable of the preceding word determines which form the definite article takes.^{[50]:20} If the last sound is an oral consonant or a glide (spelled 'y' or 'w'), and if it is preceded by an oral vowel, the definite article is *la*:

Haitian Creole	French	English	Note
<i>kravat</i> la	<i>la cravate</i>	the tie	
<i>liv</i> la	<i>le livre</i>	the book	
<i>kay</i> la	<i>la maison</i>	the house	From French "la cahut(t)e" (English "hut, shack")
<i>kaw</i> la	<i>le corbeau</i>	the crow	

If the last sound is an oral consonant and is preceded by a nasal vowel, the definite article is *lan*:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>lamp</i> lan	<i>la lampe</i>	the lamp
<i>bank</i> lan	<i>la banque</i>	the bank

If the last sound is an oral vowel and is preceded by an oral consonant, the definite article is *a*:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>kouto</i> a	<i>le couteau</i>	the knife
<i>peyi</i> a	<i>le pays</i>	the country

If the last sound is any oral vowel other than *i* or *ou* and is preceded by a nasal consonant, then the definite article is also *a*:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>lame</i> a	<i>l'armée</i>	the army
<i>anana</i> a	<i>l'ananas</i>	the pineapple
<i>dine</i> a	<i>le dîner</i>	the dinner
<i>nò</i> a	<i>le nord</i>	the north

If a word ends in *mi*, *mou*, *ni*, *nou*, or if it ends with any nasal vowel, then the definite article is *an*:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>fanmi</i> an	<i>la famille</i>	the family
<i>jenu</i> an	<i>le genou</i>	the knee
<i>chen</i> an	<i>le chien</i>	the dog
<i>pon</i> an	<i>le pont</i>	the bridge

If the last sound is a nasal consonant, the definite article is *nan*, but may also be *lan*:

Haitian Creole	French	English	
<i>machin</i> nan	<i>la voiture</i>	the car	
<i>machin</i> lan			
<i>telefonn</i> nan	<i>le téléphone</i>	the telephone	The spelling "telefòn" is also attested.
<i>telefonn</i> lan			
<i>fanm</i> nan	<i>la femme</i>	the woman	
<i>fanm</i> lan			

Demonstratives

There is a single word *sa* that corresponds to English "this" and to "that" (and to French *ce*, *ceci*, *cela*, and *ça*). As in English, it may be used as a demonstrative, except that it is placed **after** the noun that it qualifies. It is often followed by *a* or *yo* (in order to mark number): *sa a* ("this here" or "that there"):

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>jaden sa bèl</i>	<i>ce jardin est beau</i>	this garden is beautiful
		that garden is beautiful

As in English, it may also be used as a pronoun, replacing a noun:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>sa se zanmi mwen</i>	<i>c'est mon ami</i>	this is my friend
		that is my friend
<i>sa se chen frè mwen</i>	<i>c'est le chien de mon frère</i>	this is my brother's dog
		that is my brother's dog

Verbs

Many verbs in Haitian Creole are the same spoken words as the French infinitive, but there is no conjugation in the language; the verbs have one form only, and changes in tense, mood, and aspect are indicated by the use of markers:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>li ale travay nan maten</i>	<i>il va au travail le matin</i>	he goes to work in the morning
	<i>elle va au travail le matin</i>	she goes to work in the morning
<i>li dòmi aswè</i>	<i>il dort le soir</i>	he sleeps in the evening
	<i>elle dort le soir</i>	she sleeps in the evening
<i>li li Bib la</i>	<i>il lit la Bible</i>	he reads the Bible
	<i>elle lit la Bible</i>	she reads the Bible
<i>mwen fè manje</i>	<i>je fais à manger</i>	I make food
		I cook
<i>nou toujou etidye</i>	<i>nous étudions toujours</i>	we always study

Copula

The concept expressed in English by the verb "to be" is expressed in Haitian Creole by three words, *se*, *ye*, and sometimes *e*.

The verb *se* (pronounced similarly to the English word "say") is used to link a subject with a predicate nominative:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>li se frè mwen</i>	<i>il est mon frère</i>	he is my brother
<i>mwen se yon doktè</i>	<i>je suis médecin</i>	I'm a doctor
	<i>je suis docteur</i>	
<i>sa se yon pyebwa mango</i>	<i>c'est un manguier</i>	this is a mango tree
		that is a mango tree
<i>nou se zanmi</i>	<i>nous sommes amis</i>	we are friends

The subject *sa* or *li* can sometimes be omitted with *se*:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>se yon bon ide</i>	<i>c'est une bonne idée</i>	that's a good idea
		this is a good idea
<i>se nouvo chemiz mwen</i>	<i>c'est ma nouvelle chemise</i>	that's my new shirt
		this is my new shirt

To express "I want to be", usually *vin* ("to become") is used instead of *se*.

Haitian Creole	French	English	
<i>li pral vin bofrè m</i>	<i>il va devenir mon beau-frère</i>	he will be my brother-in-law	he will be my stepbrother
<i>li pral vin bofrè mwen</i>			
<i>mwen vle vin yon doktè</i>	<i>je veux devenir docteur</i>	I want to become a doctor	
<i>sa pral vin yon pye mango</i>	<i>ça va devenir un manguier</i>	that will become a mango tree	
		this will become a mango tree	
<i>nou pral vin zanmi</i>	<i>nous allons devenir amis</i>	we will be friends	

Ye also means "to be", but is placed exclusively at the **end** of a sentence, after the predicate and the subject (in that order):

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>mwen se Ayisyen</i>	<i>je suis haïtien</i>	I am Haitian
<i>Ayisyen mwen ye</i>		
<i>Koman ou ye?</i>	<i><u>lit.</u> Comment + vous + êtes</i> <i>("Comment êtes-vous?")</i>	How are you?

Haitian Creole has stative verbs, which means that the verb "to be" is not overt when followed by an adjective. Therefore, *malad* means both "sick" and "to be sick":

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>mwen gen yon sè ki malad</i>	<i>j'ai une sœur malade</i>	I have a sick sister
<i>sè mwen malad</i>	<i>ma sœur est malade</i>	my sister is sick

To have

The verb "to have" is *genyen*, often shortened to *gen*.

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>mwen gen lajan nan bank lan</i>	<i>j'ai de l'argent dans la banque</i>	I have money in the bank

There is

The verb *genyen* (or *gen*) also means "there is" or "there are":

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>gen anpil Ayisyen nan Florid</i>	<i>il y a beaucoup d'Haïtiens en Floride</i>	there are many Haitians in Florida
<i>gen on moun la</i>	<i>il y a quelqu'un là</i>	there is someone here
		there is someone there
<i>pa gen moun la</i>	<i>il n'y a personne là</i>	there is nobody here
		there is nobody there

To know

The Haitian Creole word for "to know" and "to know how" is *konnen*, which is often shortened to *konn*.

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>Eske ou konnen non li?</i>	<i>Est-ce que tu connais son nom?</i>	Do you know his name?
		Do you know her name?
<i>mwen konnen kote li ye</i>	<i>je sais où il est</i>	I know where he is
	<i>je sais où elle est</i>	I know where she is
<i>Mwen konn fè manje</i>	<i>Je sais comment faire à manger</i>	I know how to cook (lit. "I know how to make food")
<i>Eske ou konn ale Ayiti?</i>	<i>Est-ce que tu as été en Haïti?</i>	Have you been to Haiti? (lit. "Do you know to go to Haiti?")
<i>Li pa konn li franse</i>	<i>Il ne sait pas lire le français</i>	He cannot read French (lit. "He doesn't know how to read French")
	<i>Elle ne sait pas lire le français</i>	She cannot read French (lit. "She doesn't know how to read French")

To do

Fè means "do" or "make". It has a broad range of meanings, as it is one of the most common verbs used in idiomatic phrases.

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>Kòman ou fè pale kreyòl?</i>	<i>Comment as-tu appris à parler Créole?</i>	How did you learn to speak Haitian Creole?
<i>Marie konn fè mayi moulèn.</i>	<i>Marie sait faire de la farine de maïs.</i>	Marie knows how to make cornmeal.

To be able to

The verb *kapab* (or shortened to *ka*, *kap* or *kab*) means "to be able to (do something)". It refers to both "capability" and "availability":

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>mwen ka ale demen</i>	<i>je peux aller demain</i>	I can go tomorrow
<i>petèt mwen ka fè sa demen</i>	<i>je peux peut-être faire ça demain</i>	maybe I can do that tomorrow
<i>nou ka ale pita</i>	<i>nous pouvons aller plus tard</i>	we can go later

Tense markers

There is no conjugation in Haitian Creole. In the present non-progressive tense, one just uses the basic verb form for stative verbs:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>mwen pale kreyòl</i>	<i>je parle créole</i>	I speak Creole

When the basic form of action verbs is used without any verb markers, it is generally understood as referring to the past:

Haitian Creole	French	English
<i>mwen manje</i>	<i>j'ai mangé</i>	I ate
<i>ou manje</i>	<i>tu as mangé</i>	you ate
<i>li manje</i>	<i>il a mangé</i>	he ate
	<i>elle a mangé</i>	she ate
<i>nou manje</i>	<i>nous avons mangé</i>	we ate
<i>yo manje</i>	<i>ils ont mangé</i>	they ate
	<i>elles ont mangé</i>	

Manje means both "food" and "to eat", as *manger* does in Canadian French; *m ap manje bon manje* means "I am eating good food".

For other tenses, special "tense marker" words are placed before the verb. The basic ones are:

Tense marker	Tense	Annotations
<i>te</i>	simple past	from French <i>été</i> ("been")
<i>t ap</i>	past progressive	a combination of <i>te</i> and <i>ap</i> , "was doing"
<i>ap</i>	present progressive	with <i>ap</i> and <i>a</i> , the pronouns nearly always take the short form (<i>m ap</i> , <i>l ap</i> , <i>n ap</i> , <i>y ap</i> , etc.). From 18th-century French <i>être après</i> , progressive form
<i>a</i>	future	some limitations on use. From French <i>avoir à</i> ("to have to")
<i>pral</i>	near or definite future	translates to "going to". Contraction of French <i>pour aller</i> ("going to")
<i>ta</i>	conditional future	a combination of <i>te</i> and <i>a</i> ("will do")

Simple past or past perfect:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>mwen te manje</i>	I ate
	I had eaten
<i>ou te manje</i>	you ate
	you had eaten
<i>li te manje</i>	he ate
	she ate
	he had eaten
	she had eaten
<i>nou te manje</i>	we ate
	we had eaten
<i>yo te manje</i>	they ate
	they had eaten

Past progressive:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>mwen t ap manje</i>	I was eating
<i>ou t ap manje</i>	you were eating
<i>li t ap manje</i>	he was eating
	she was eating
<i>nou t ap manje</i>	we were eating
<i>yo t ap manje</i>	they were eating

Present progressive:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>m ap manje</i>	I am eating
<i>w ap manje</i>	you are eating
<i>l ap manje</i>	he is eating
	she is eating
<i>n ap manje</i>	we are eating
<i>y ap manje</i>	they are eating

For the present progressive, it is customary, though not necessary, to add *kounye a* ("right now"):

Haitian Creole	English
<i>m ap manje kounye a</i>	I am eating right now
<i>y ap manje kounye a</i>	they are eating right now

Also, *ap manje* can mean "will eat" depending on the context of the sentence:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>m ap manje apre m priye</i>	I will eat after I pray
	I am eating after I pray
<i>mwen pap di sa</i>	I will not say that
	I am not saying that

Near or definite future:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>mwen pral manje</i>	I am going to eat
<i>ou pral manje</i>	you are going to eat
<i>li pral manje</i>	he is going to eat
	she is going to eat
<i>nou pral manje</i>	we are going to eat
<i>yo pral manje</i>	they are going to eat

Future:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>n a wè pita</i>	see you later (lit. "we will see later")

Other examples:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>mwen te wè zanmi ou yè</i>	I saw your friend yesterday
<i>nou te pale lontan</i>	we spoke for a long time
<i>lè l te gen uit an...</i>	when he was eight years old...
	when she was eight years old...
<i>m a travay</i>	I will work
<i>m pral travay</i>	I'm going to work
<i>n a li l demen</i>	we'll read it tomorrow
<i>nou pral li l demen</i>	we are going to read it tomorrow
<i>mwen t ap mache epi m te wè yon chen</i>	I was walking and I saw a dog

Recent past markers include *fèk* and *sòt* (both mean "just" or "just now" and are often used together):

Haitian Creole	English
<i>mwen fèk sòt antre kay la</i>	I just entered the house

A verb mood marker is *ta*, corresponding to English "would" and equivalent to the French conditional tense:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>yo ta renmen jwe</i>	they would like to play
<i>mwen ta vini si m te gen yon machin</i>	I would come if I had a car
<i>li ta bliye w si ou pa t la</i>	he would forget you if you weren't here
	she would forget you if you weren't here

Negation

The word *pa* comes before a verb and any tense markers to negate it:

Haitian Creole	English
<i>Rose pa vle ale</i>	Rose doesn't want to go
<i>Rose pa t vle ale</i>	Rose didn't want to go

Lexicon

Most of the lexicon of Creole is derived from French, with significant changes in pronunciation and morphology; often the French definite article was retained as part of the noun. For example, the French definite article *la* in *la lune* ("the moon") was incorporated into the Creole noun for moon: *lalin*. However, the language also inherited many words of different origins, among them Wolof, Fon, Kongo, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Taino and Arabic.

Haitian Creole creates and borrows new words to describe new or old concepts and realities. Examples of this are *fè bak* which was borrowed from English and means "to move backwards" (the original word derived from French is *rekile* from *reculer*), and also from English, *napkin*, which is being used as well as *tòchon*, from the French *torchon*.

Sample

Haitian Creole	IPA	Origin	English
ablado ^[51]	/ablado/	Spanish: <i>hablador</i>	"a talker"
anasi	/anasi/	Akan: <i>ananse</i>	spider
annanna	/ãnãna/	Taino: <i>ananas</i> ; also used in French	pineapple
Ayiti	/ajiti/	Taino: <i>Ahatti</i> , lit. 'mountainous land'	Haiti ("mountainous land")
bagay	/bagaj/	French: <i>bagage</i> , lit. 'baggage'	thing
bannann	/bânân/	French: <i>banane</i> , lit. 'banana'	banana/plantain
bekàn	/bekan/	French: <i>bécane</i>	bicycle
bokit ^[8]	/bokit/	bucket	
bòkò	/bɔkɔ/	Fon: <i>bokono</i>	sorcerer
Bondye	/bɔ̃dje/	French: <i>bon dieu</i> , lit. 'good God'	God
chenèt	/ʃenɛt/	French: <i>quénette</i> (French Antilles)	gap between the two front teeth
chouk	/ʃuk/	Fula: <i>chuk</i> , lit. 'to pierce, to poke'	poke
dekabes	/dekabes/	Spanish: <i>dos cabezas</i> , lit. 'two heads'	two-headed win during dominos
dèyè	/dɛjɛ/	French: <i>derrière</i>	behind
diri	/diʁi/	French: <i>du riz</i> , lit. 'some rice'	rice
Etazini ^[52]	/etazini/	French: <i>États-Unis</i>	United States
fig	/fig/	French: <i>figue</i> , lit. 'fig'	banana ^[53]
je	/ʒe/	French: <i>les yeux</i> , lit. 'the eyes'	eye
kannistè ^[8]	/kannistɛ/	canister	tin can
kay	/kaj/	French: <i>la cahutte</i> , lit. 'the hut'	house
kle	/kle/	French: <i>clé</i> , lit. 'key'	key, wrench
kle kola	/kle kola/	French: <i>clé</i> , lit. 'key'	bottle opener
		cola	
kònfleks	/kɔ̃nfleks/	corn flakes	breakfast cereal
kawotchou	/kawotʃu/	French: <i>caoutchouc</i> , lit. 'rubber'	tire
lalin	/lalɛ̃/	French: <i>la lune</i> , lit. 'the moon'	moon
li	/li/	French: <i>lui</i>	he, she, him, her, it
makak	/makak/	French: <i>macaque</i>	monkey
manbo	/mãbo/	Kongo: <i>mambu</i> or Fon: <i>nanbo</i>	vodou priestess
marasa	/maʁasa/	Kongo: <i>mapassa</i>	twins
matant	/matât/	French: <i>ma tante</i> , lit. 'my aunt'	aunt, aged woman
moun	/mun/	French: <i>monde</i> , lit. 'world'	people, person
mwen	/mwɛ̃/	French: <i>moi</i> , lit. 'me'	I, me, my, myself
nimewo	/nimewo/	French: <i>numéro</i> , lit. 'number'	number
oungan	/ügã/	Fon: <i>houngan</i>	vodou priest
piman	/pimã/	French: <i>piment</i>	a very hot <u>pepper</u>
pann	/pãn/	French: <i>pendre</i> , lit. 'to hang'	clothesline
podyab	/podjab/	French: <i>pauvre diable</i> or Spanish: <i>pobre diablo</i>	poor devil
pwa	/pwa/	French: <i>pois</i> , lit. 'pea'	bean
sapat ^[51]	/sapat/	Spanish: <i>zapato</i> ; French: <i>savatte</i>	sandal
seyfing	/sejfin/	surfing	sea-surfing
tonton	/tõtô/	French: <i>tonton</i>	uncle, aged man
vwazen	/vwazɛ̃/	French: <i>voisin</i>	neighbor
yo	/jo/	Fon: <i>ye</i>	they, them, their; plural marker
zonbi	/zõbi/	Kongo: <i>nzumbi</i>	soulless corpse, living dead, ghost, <u>zombie</u>
zwazo	/zwazo/	French: <i>les oiseaux</i> , lit. 'the birds'	bird

Nèg* and *blan

Although *nèg* and *blan* have similar words in French (*nègre*, a pejorative to refer to black people, and *blanc*, meaning white, or white person), the meanings they carry in French do not apply in Haitian Creole. *Nèg* means "person", regardless of skin color (like "guy" or "dude" in American English).^[54] The word *blan* generally means "foreigner" or "not from Haiti". Thus, a non-black Haitian man would be called *nèg*, while a black person from the US could be referred to as *blan*.^{[54][55]}

Etymologically, the word *nèg* is derived from the French *nègre* and is cognate with the Spanish *negro* ("black", both the color and the people).

There are many other Haitian Creole terms for specific tones of skin including *grimo*, *bren*, *roz*, and *mawon*. Some Haitians consider such labels as offensive because of their association with color discrimination and the Haitian class system, while others use the terms freely.

Examples

Salutations

Haitian Creole	English
A demen!	See you tomorrow!
A pi ta!	See you later!
Adye!	Good bye! (permanently)
Anchante!	Nice to meet you! (lit. "enchanted!")
Bon apre-midi!	Good afternoon!
Bòn chans!	Good luck!
Bònn nui!	Good night!
Bonjou!	Good day!
	Good morning!
Bonswa!	Good evening
Dezole!	Sorry!
Eskize'm!	Excuse me!
Kenbe la!	Hang in there! (informal)
Ki jan ou rele?	What's your name?
Ki non ou?	
Ki non w?	
Koman ou rele?	
Mwen rele	My name is...
Non'm se.	
Ki jan ou ye?	How are you?
Ki laj ou?	How old are you? (lit. "What is your age?")
Ki laj ou genyen?	
Kòman ou ye?	How are you?
Kon si, kon sa	So, so
Kontinye konsa!	Keep it up!
M'ap boule	I'm managing (informal; lit. "I'm burning") (common response to <i>sa kap fèt</i> and <i>sak pase</i>)
M'ap kenbe	I'm hanging on (informal)
M'ap viv	I'm living
Mal	Bad
Men wi	Of course
Mèsi	Thank you
Mèsi anpil	Many thanks
Mwen byen	I'm well
Mwen dakò	I agree
Mwen gen an	I'm years old
Mwen la	I'm so-so (informal; lit. "I'm here")
N a wè pita!	See you later! (lit. "We will see later!")
Orevwa!	Good bye (temporarily)
Pa mal	Not bad
Pa pi mal	Not so bad
Padon!	Pardon!
	Sorry!
	Move!
Padonne m!	Pardon me!
	Forgive me!
Pòte w byen!	Take care! (lit. "Carry yourself well!")
Sa k'ap fèt?	What's going on? (informal)
	What's up? (informal)
Sa'k pase?	What's happening? (informal)

	What's up? (informal)
Tout al byen	All is well (lit. "All goes well")
Tout bagay anfòm	Everything is fine (lit. "Everything is in form")
Tout pa bon	All is not well (lit. "All is not good")

Proverbs and expressions

Proverbs play a central role in traditional Haitian culture and Haitian Creole speakers make frequent use of them as well as of other metaphors.^[56]

Proverbs

Haitian Creole	English
Men anpil, chay pa lou	Strength through unity ^[57] (lit. "With many hands, the burden is not heavy"; ^[58] Haitian Creole equivalent of the French on the coat of arms of Haiti, which reads <i>l'union fait la force</i>)
Aprè bal, tanbou lou	There are consequences to your actions (lit. "After the dance, the drum is heavy") ^[59]
Sak vid pa kanpe	No work gets done on an empty stomach (lit. "An empty bag does not stand up") ^{[60]:60}
Pitit tig se tig	Like father like son (lit. "The son of a tiger is a tiger")
Ak pasyans w ap wè tete pis	Anything is possible (lit. "With patience you will see the breast of the ant")
Bay kou bliye, pòte mak sonje	The giver of the blow forgets, the carrier of the scar remembers
Mache chèche pa janm dòmi san soupe	You will get what you deserve
Bèl dan pa di zanmi	Not all smiles are friendly
Bèl antèman pa di paradi	A beautiful funeral does not guarantee heaven
Bel fanm pa di bon menaj	A beautiful wife does not guarantee a happy marriage
Dan konn mode lang	People who work together sometimes hurt each other (lit. "Teeth are known to bite the tongue")
Sa k rive koukouloulou a ka rive kakalanga tou	What happens to the dumb guy can happen to the smart one too (lit. "What happens to the turkey can happen to the rooster too") ^{[60]:75}
Chak jou pa Dimanch	Your luck will not last forever (lit. "Not every day is Sunday")
Fanm pou yon tan, manman pou tout tan	A woman is for a time, a mother is for all time ^{[60]:93}
Nèg di san fè, Bondye fè san di	Man talks without doing, God does without talking ^{[60]:31}
Sa Bondye sere pou ou, lavalas pa ka pote l ale	What God has saved for you, nobody can take it away
Nèg rich se milat, milat pòv se nèg	A rich negro is a mulatto, a poor mulatto is a negro
Pale franse pa di lespri	Speaking French does not mean you are smart ^{[60]:114}
Wòch nan dlo pa konnen doulè wòch nan solèy	The rock in the water does not know the pain of the rock in the sun ^[61]
Ravèt pa janm gen rezon devan poul	Justice will always be on the side of the stronger ^[62] (lit. "A cockroach in front of a chicken is never correct")
Si ou bwè dlo nan vè, respèkte vè a	If you drink water from a glass, respect the glass
Si travay te bon bagay, moun rich ta pran l lontan	If work were a good thing, the rich would have grabbed it a long time ago
Sèl pa vante tèt li di li sale	Let others praise you (lit. "Salt doesn't brag that it's salty," said to those who praise themselves)
Bouch granmoun santi, sak ladan l se rezon	Wisdom comes from the mouth of old people (lit. "The mouth of the old stinks but what's inside is wisdom")
Tout moun se moun	Everyone matters (lit. "Everybody is a person") ^[63]

Expressions

As of 2009, up to 80,000 Haitians were estimated residing in the Bahamas,^[80] where about 20,000 speak Haitian Creole. It is the third most-spoken language after English and Bahamian Creole.^[81]

Software

After the 2010 Haiti earthquake, international aid workers desperately needed translation tools for communicating in Haitian Creole. Furthermore, international organizations had little idea whom to contact as translators. As an emergency measure, Carnegie Mellon University released data for its own research into the public domain.^[82] Microsoft Research and Google Translate implemented alpha version machine translators based on the Carnegie Mellon data.

Several smartphone apps have been released, including learning with flashcards by Byki and two medical dictionaries, one by Educa Vision and a second by Ultralingua, the latter of which includes an audio phrase book and a section on cultural anthropology.

See also

- Radio Haiti-Inter
- Creole language
- Antillean Creole
- Louisiana Creole
- Akademi Kreyòl Ayisyen
- Michel DeGraff

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[ũgã] 'prêtre vaudou'
[ũsi] 'assistante du prêtre/ de la prêtresse'
[ũfɔ] 'sanctuaire du temple vaudou'
[hũ] 'tambour'
[ogũ] 'divinité vaudou'
[ũgɛvɛ] 'collier au cou du prêtre vaudou'
[bũda] 'derrière'
[pĩga] 'prenez garde'
[kaʃĩbo] 'pipe de terre'
[jũ/ũ nɛg] 'un individu'"
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External links

- "Indiana University Creole Institute" (<http://www.indiana.edu/~creole/>).
- "Words R Us Haitian Creole Dictionary and Phrasebook" (<http://www.wordsrus.info/l1/index/index.php>).
- Haitian Creole basic vocabulary (from Wiktionary's Swadesh-list appendix)

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